Authentic Leadership: A Comparison of Follower Perceptions in UAE & USA

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Abstract

As a reaction to negative examples of contemporary leadership practice in various societal areas, authentic leadership theory proposes to offer an alternative values-based model. Drawing upon the work of Kernis (2003), Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008), the present endeavor employs the concept of authentic leadership as consisting of the following four dimensions: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing. Based on previous research about the influence of national culture on leadership behavior, the present endeavor develops a model, which proposes that employees in low power distance cultures perceive their leaders as more authentic than employees in secular and high power distance cultures. The hypothesis was tested among employees from UAE and USA (N = 42). The results revealed there were no significant differences between the two groups in what the four dimensions of authentic leadership are concerned.

Keywords: authentic leadership, cultures, UAE, USA

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Introduction

In today's globalized world organizational leadership is often confronted with different external as well as internal challenges. These challenges often give rise to complex situations which further impart negative repercussions. These challenging situations are further aggravated by negative leadership behaviors. In order to tackle this issue Avolio & Gardner (2005) propounded values-based leadership which is named as authentic leadership. Authentic leaders are people able to show a line of behavior governed largely by four basic principles such as transparency in relationships, self-awareness, balanced processing and internalized morality. These leaders are open to others and shown as they are without fear of judgments and assessments. Surely this fact creates a good climate of confidence in their partners that makes them willing to share their thoughts and emotions (Ilies et al. 2005).

Likewise, Avolio & Gardner (2005) assert that leaders following the theory of authentic leadership always carry sufficient awareness of their weaknesses and strengths. As a result, they increase enhance their constructive qualities and rapidly detect the part in which their behavior cannot be efficient. Additionally, authentic leaders are able to examine objectively and precisely the information that is relevant to make a certain decision. Moroever, these leaders have a strong self-regulation behavior based on their own principles and values. As a result, they are able to deal with the hierarchical, social, maintain a constant line of conduct. The outcome of following authentic leadership is consistency and coherence in their conduct.

The researchers further expressed that authentic leaders are well familiar about themselves and they encourage transparency in personal and professional relations. While considering the increasing debate on the authentic leadership, the current research study aims to compare the perceptions of the USA and UAE followers regarding authentic leadership. In this way, a comparison between the respondents from UAE and the United States is carried out.

Conceptual Background

The debate on the authentic leadership theory is ongoing since many years. The researchers like Avolio et al., (2004) Cooper & Nelson, (2006), Cameron et al. (2003), Luthans & Avolio, (2003) and Luthans, (2002) have mainly focused on the concept of authentic leadership in their studies. While explaining the concept of authenticity from psychological perspective, Seligman (2002), defined the term as "owning one's personal experiences, be they emotions, thoughts, preferences, beliefs or needs, courses of action captured by the command to have acquaintance with oneself" and showing the behavior in compliance with the personality (Harter 2002).

According to Luthans and Avolio (2003), the concept of authentic leadership is a route that derives from both an extremely established organizational context and constructive psychological competencies which further results in both greater self-awareness and self-synchronized constructive behaviors. Though, numerous authors such as Cooper et al., (2005); Shamir & Eilam, (2005), Sparrowe, (2005) have shared their apprehensions regarding the exact meaning of authentic leadership. According to these researchers authentic leadership is encircle the constructive psychological capabilities of hope, self-assurance and buoyancy.

While making a sketch the concept of authenticity focused on four-component model of authentic leadership Ilies et al. (2005) included unbiased processing, self-consciousness, authentic behavior and authentic relational orientation. On the other hand, Shamir et al. (2005) explained that authentic leaders carries certain attributes such as a key constituent of self, self-consistency, and self-communicative behavior.

In an attempt to combine various perspectives and definitions, different researchers such as Gardner et al. (2005) suggested a authentic leader development based on self-based model. These researchers stressed on the constituents of authentic leadership applicable to core self-regulation and self-awareness. They recognized a number of unique characteristics related with the processes of authentic self-regulation, including fair information processing, internalized directive, authentic behavior and relational transparency. Additionally, these researchers together expressed that authentic leaders consist certain constructive moral perspectives which are distinguished by elevated moral standards that play a substantial role in behavior and decision making.

While referring to the basic authentic leadership theories, the researchers have applied different theories such as ethical leadership, social perception, positive psychology, vital engagement and neo-charismatic leadership. The major aspects of authentic leadership consist of the stress it puts on the development of both the follower and leader. The selves of followers changes over time, when they internalize the values showed by the leader. Avolio and Gardner (2005), in this process, saw the authentic leaders different from leaders following transformational leadership theory. Authentic leaders, unlike to transformational leaders, does not aim to transform but focuses more on making role models. The researchers also draw the line between servant leadership and authentic leadership by expressing that servant leadership do not identify the reconciling role of follower related to self-and regulation and awareness, positive organization and positive psychological capital.

Several other researchers like Shirey et al. (2009) have also commented on authentic leadership. The researchers concluded that the research of authentic leadership is based mainly on social psychological theory and authenticity. They evidently expressed the primary role of an internalized ethical viewpoint to the concept of authentic leadership and stressed more on the development of authentic followers and leaders. The researchers further expressed that authentic leaders follows a leadership behavior that encourages both constructive ethical conduct and constructive psychological capacities in order to promote fair processing of information, internalization of ethical standard, enhaned self-awareness and relational transparency on the part of leaders. Along with that this behavior encourages positive self-development while working with followers.

Authentic Culture and Different Cultures

According to Hofsede & Hofsede (2011), one of the reasons a specific leadership style exists in an organization is culture in its organizational and national aspects, which are alleged as the particular foundation of that leadership style. Though, it is emphasized that culture is common for an entire organization, leaders do play a significant role in producing it. Since leaders act as an inspiration, a model, they demonstrate acceptable or unacceptable behaviors to followers. In contrast, culture imparts a major influence on leaders, the way they perform, function, and build relations with their inferiors. Every so often dissimilar cultures demand dissimilar leadership styles. In actual fact, some researchers like Avery (2009) have explored that every other culture demands and develops different leadership styles which are acceptable according to the norms, values and ethical standards in the respective culture. Culture influences the behaviors of leaders in organizations, both limiting and creating them at the same course of time. Consequently, culture is an indispensable and integral component in the process of building relationships between a leader and followers.

The current research stresses on two different cultures, the American and the culture of United Arab Emirates. The culture of United States is highly idiosyncratic, uncertainty avoidance, medium on masculinity and low on power distance. Within in the organizations of the United

States, there is a low score on the dimension of power distance which indicates that hierarchy is severely a matter of expediency and superiors are always easy to approach, at the same time, leader depend on teams and employees for their knowledge. The flows of information between the two levels of managers and employees and communication are direct, participative and informal. Taking into account the sense of accountability and transparency present in cultures having low power distance, leaders are perceived to be more inclined towards authenticity.

According to Kabasakal et al. (2001), the culture in UAE in terms of practicing leadership restricted. There are certain restrictions like political, legal and cultural. According to Hofsede (2011), these limitations make the culture high on power distance. The United Arab Emirates presents unique economic, geographic, social, political and demographic indicators and characteristics. In the last decades, United Arab Emirates has gone under impressive transformation and have been transformed rapidly from an indigent traditional society into an extremely modern internationalized and mainly modernized nation (Kabasakal et al. 2001). Due to rich oil resources; modernization and economic changes have turn out to be very swift to the cultural identity and lifestyle of this fundamentally traditional society. Due to a unique culture, the discretion of leaders in including their followers or subordinates in the discussions deprives the overall process of decision making. In the context of high power distance, such as that of UAE, it is exceedingly probable that leaders will be supposed as less authentic.

Based on the discussion carried out above, hypothesis of the present research is as under:

People from low power distance cultures, USA, perceive their leaders as more authentic as compared with high-power distance culture, as the employees of UAE. The perception of the employees was based on four dimensions such as internalization of ethical standard, relational transparency, balanced processing and self-consciousness.

Method
Participants

The method of selecting the participants for the research was snowball sampling through social media. For this purpose, Facebook was used as the social media channel. The participants were selected with the help of snowball sampling via social media (Facebook). There were 42 participants in the research. Among the total research participants, half of them belonged to the high power distance culture representing UAE, and the other half belonged to a low power culture that represents America. The majority of the participants in the research sample belong to IT, media and education sectors.

Demographics:

Age:

Age	Employee %
18-24	17%
25-30	32%
31-40	25%

41-50	21%
51-60	5%

Table 1 Demographic information (Age)

Tenure:

Tenure	Employee %
Less than 2 years	20%
2-5 years	42%
5-10 years	25%
Over 10 years	13%

Table 2 Demographic information (tenure with the leader)

Culture:

Country	Employee %
UAE	50%
USA	50%

Table 3 Culture

Measures

    After selecting the research sample, the questionnaire technique was used which was based on different questions intended to know about the perceptions of followers regarding authentic leadership. The questionnaire was primary data collection source through which the responses of the research participants were collected. Subsequently, it was important to analyze the responses of the research participants. Therefore, the technique of the Authentic Leadership Inventory, as suggested by Neider and Schreisheim (2011), was used to measure the perceived responses of the followers pertinent to authentic leadership. According to the ALI model questions based on the dimensions similar to ALQ were included. These dimensions were internalization of ethical standard, relational transparency, balanced processing and self-consciousness.

    The format of the responses in this tool was Likert scale based on five points. These points were ranging from disagree strongly to agree strongly. In order to get accurate results, the participants were asked to select the level to which they settled with the statements regarding their leader. Altogether there were fourteen questions based on factor structure, support for content validity, discriminant, concurrent and convergent validity which was explored in the study that authenticated the Likert scale. After conducting measurement through ALI scales, reliability analysis was condcuted which aimed to indicate acceptable alpha values for the four ALI scales (.74, .81, .83, and .85).

    Data on culture was acquired by the information filled by the research participants. The responses of the participants and their country of origin were coded as high and low power distance cultures, UAE and the USA. Besides, the study also included the control variable which represents tenure and age of the leader.

    These demographic variables were included in previous studies of authentic leadership for their potential influence on outcome variables (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2008) A small scale pilot study was conducted with 2 respondents from Romania who gave feedback on the questionnaire. The respondents reported they understood the questions as

formulated in English. Cabanda, Fields, and Winston (2011) noted that a pilot study will help ensure items in the questionnaire are valid and reliable. The scale employed was developed and has been validated byprevious studies, thus ensuring content validity.

Procedure

The procedure for conducting the research was completely based on online survey system. The channel for this survey system was Online Google Docs. For the purpose of developing an enhanced view of the perceptions of the followers regarding authentic leadership in low UAE and American, high power distance cultures. The snowball technique through Facebook was used to employ a sample of research respondents. The main purpose of selecting the snowball sampling technique via social media was to get diverse results.

Likewise, the online survey is based on pilot testing and includes 19 questions. The maximum time to complete the survey was around three to six minutes. In the phase of pilot testing, the respondents of UAE reported a better understanding of all the questions. This understanding of the UAE respondents indicated that in majority of the organizations in UAE, the use of English language is common. In the beginning of the questionnaire the purpose of the research and an informed consent was present to make the research participants well aware about the research purpose and ethics. The conduct of the research was based on certain ethical considerations. These considerations were related to the confidentiality of participants' identity and other confidential information. In order to establish and maintain the credibility of the research, all the necessary measures were taken by the researchers.

Results:

In order to conduct the data analysis of the selected sample size (n=42), 2*2*2 factorial ANOVA is used in order to access the independent variable including culture as well as dependent variable including age and gender. In addition to this, impact of these variable is access on four leadership dimensions. Control variables are grouped into two groups on the basis of median. The result showed that there is no significant relationship between control variables and dependent variables. Moreover, the value of $P > 0.05$ which suggest that variable has no impact four dimensions of the leadership.
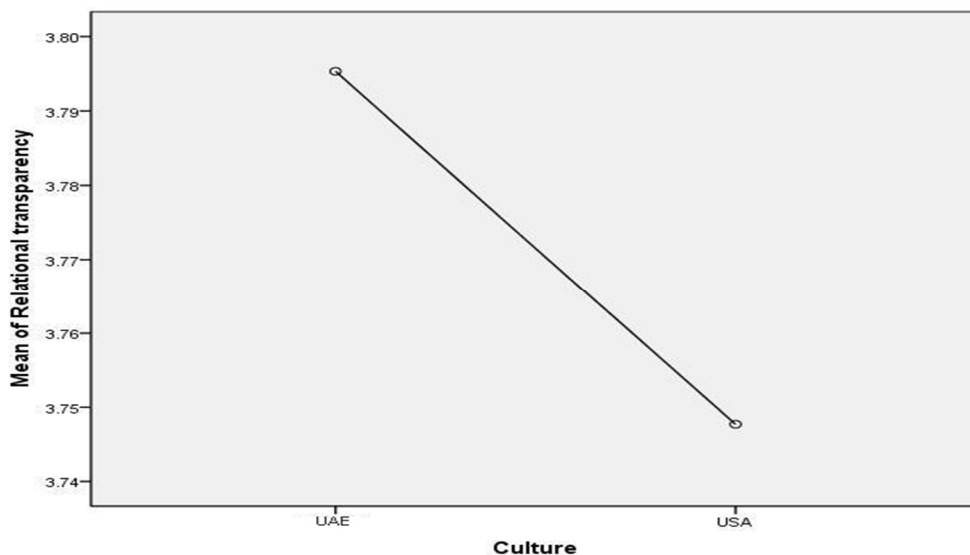

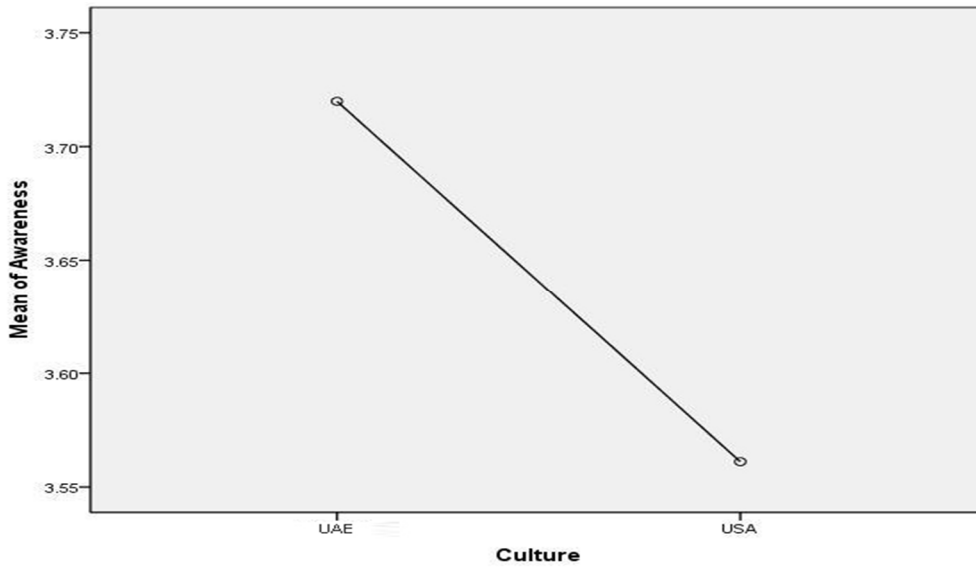**Figure 1 Means plot for relational transparency dimension**

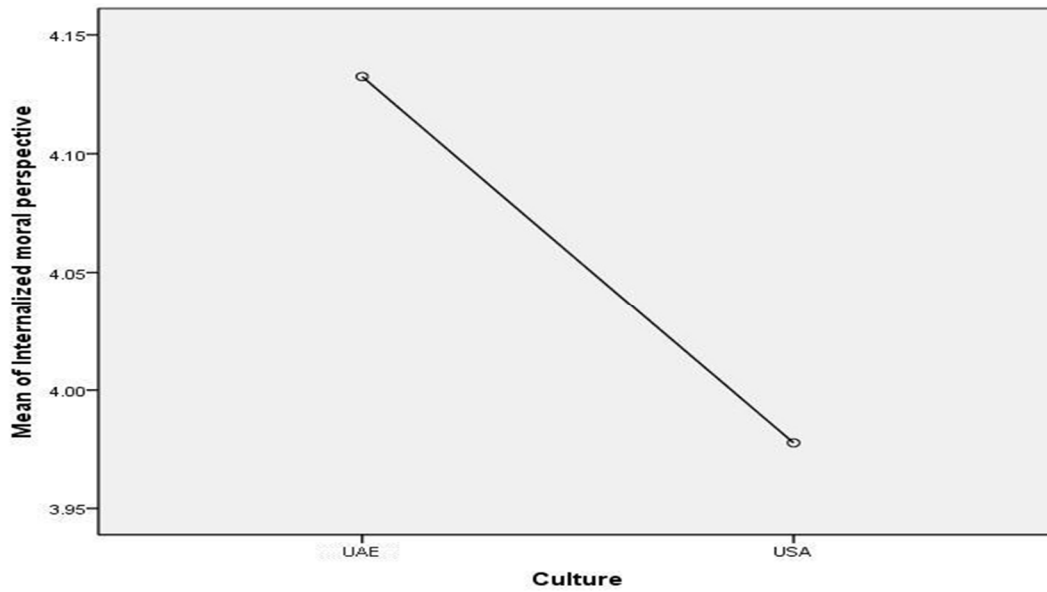**Figure 2 Means plot for self-awareness dimension.**

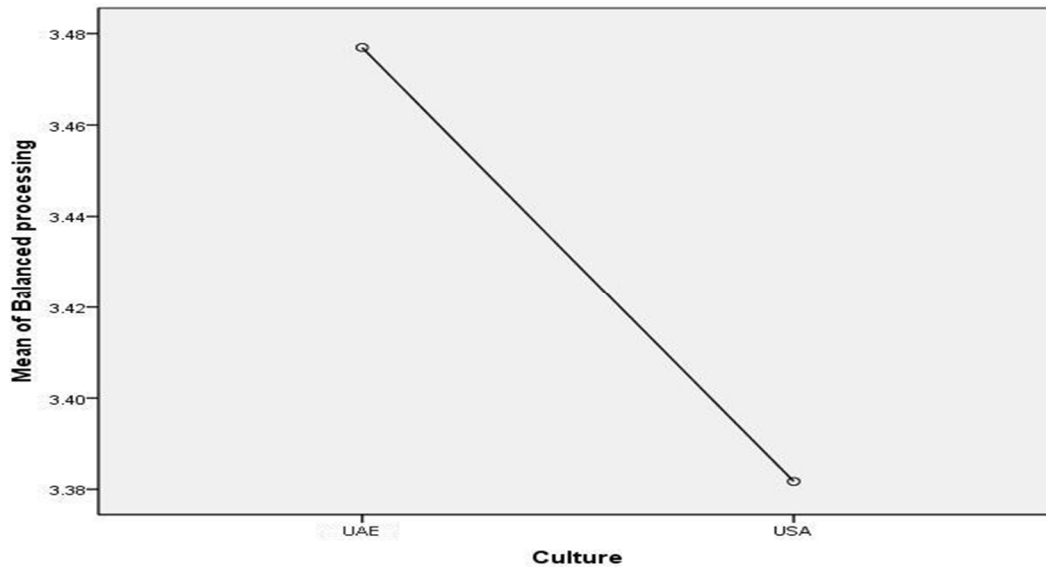**Figure 3 Means plot for internalized moral perspective dimension.**

Figure 4 Means plot for balanced processing dimension.

The analysis also showed that there is no significant difference among the followers of low and high power distance countries that is USA and UAE. The study shows that, there is no such variation among the dimensions of authentic leadership while considering both countries. However, there is limitation of the study due to small sample size. The study also helps to paved path for other researchers to carry out similar research with different countries and sample side.

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